

# The Muslim Doctrine of Prophethood in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Japan: Is the Buddha a Prophet?<sup>1</sup>

**Kieko Obuse**

*University of Oxford  
Oxford*

## Introduction

From early on in their history, Muslims have employed the concept of prophethood in relating to non-Muslim peoples and their traditions by recognizing their spiritual leaders as prophets. This is mostly demonstrated regarding the Abrahamic traditions, such as Christianity, where Jesus is viewed as a prophet. Despite the lack of clear reference to Buddhists in the *Qur'ān*, a number of prominent classical scholars and contemporary writers have attempted to interpret Buddhism in a similar doctrinal framework. For example, Ibn al-Nadīm (d.995) regards the Buddha as a prophet, viewing him as one of Allah's apostles to the Indians.<sup>2</sup> Al-Shahrastānī (1086–1153) compares the Buddha to al-Khidr, who could also be considered a prophet.<sup>3</sup> In the contemporary world, the view of the historical Buddha as a Muslim prophet is found particularly widely among Muslims from South and Southeast Asia, where Buddhist-Muslim relations have been in progress for a long time. For such Muslims, who benefit from good relations with Buddhists, the doctrine of prophethood provides a useful means of interrelating.

In the globalized world of today, encounters with Buddhists are not limited to those in certain parts of Asia. Muslim emigrants to non-Muslim countries and converts to Islam there, in particular, have already been dealing with the dominant religious and cultural traditions of their locality. Japan, a generally Buddhist country with a small growing Muslim community, is no exception.<sup>4</sup> Despite the relatively short history of direct Japanese-Muslim involvement,<sup>5</sup> some Muslims, both Japanese and non-Japanese, have attempted to relate to local traditions, exploring the possibility of a Japanese prophet.

The present article examines the views of leading figures from Japan's Muslim communities regarding the historical Buddha. Such figures may exert substantial influence upon future Buddhist-Muslim relations through their involvement in interreligious dialogues and hermeneutical activities. The article pays particular attention to the

views of Japanese Muslims, mainly discussing the following two points: 1) that Japanese Muslims are more cautious about recognizing Śākyamuni as a prophet than non-Japanese Muslims, both in and outside Japan. This may be because they, as converts, are highly careful not to be too “creative” with their interpretations of the Islamic teachings; and 2) that they simultaneously desire to see more connections established between Islam and Buddhism, which may contribute to future recognition of the Buddha as a prophet. The article first examines the scriptural basis for the Buddha’s potential prophethood, exploring how it is employed by various types of contemporary Muslims outside Japan. Then it outlines the situations of Muslims in Japan, discussing some Japanese Muslim attempts to find a Japanese prophet. Finally, it examines how Muslims in Japan apply the doctrine of prophethood to the historical Buddha, exploring why the approach by Japanese Muslims is different from that of non-Japanese.

## **Prophethood in Islam: its Definition and Applicability to Buddhism**

The doctrine of prophethood is the main framework for Muslim recognition of other religions. It is closely related to the idea of *dīn al-ḥaqq*, the original religion, which accounts for non-Muslim traditions. What follows examines some basic implications that the Islamic doctrine of prophethood has for the notion of the historical Buddha as a prophet.

### ***Prophets in Islam***

Prophets are human individuals who receive revelation from God and have a mission to propagate it among their peoples. Although extremely virtuous and morally impeccable, they are mortals and not divine.<sup>6</sup> With such special intellectual faculty and imagination, they present the Truth incomprehensible to the ordinary populace in symbols and metaphors that are intelligible to them.<sup>7</sup> According to the *Qur’ān* (e.g. 10:47, 16:36, 35:24), every nation has a prophet (or messenger) sent to them by God; all sent between the times of Adam and Muḥammad, the first and the last of the succession of prophethood respectively. All prophets serve their own peoples, such as Jesus for the Israelites, excepting Muḥammad, as the last and final prophet, whose mission was universal. While twenty-five prophets are named in the *Qur’ān*, many others are left unspecified.<sup>8</sup> The exact number of these unnamed prophets is not established, ranging between a few thousand to as many as 124,000,<sup>9</sup> and including non-Israelite prophets.

This suggests that there is good reason within Islamic parameters to consider Siddhārtha Gautama (c.563–c.483 BCE), the historical Buddha, as a prophet. He lived before the coming of Muḥammad (and after Adam), and his sphere of activity is not covered by that of biblical prophets. It may, therefore, at least be possible to consider him one of the unnamed non-Israelite prophets, sent to what is now Nepal and/or India. Some scholars, mostly those with a South Asian background, have even suggested that the Buddha is indeed named in the *Qur’ān* (21:85 and 38:48) as Dhu-l Kifl, “the man

from Kapilavastu,”<sup>10</sup> or that the fig tree mentioned in the *Qur’ān* (95:1) refers to the bodhi tree under which he attained enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> While these theories of potential Qur’ānic reference to the historical Buddha do not seem to be widely accepted, they reflect well the Muslim willingness to recognize other religions through “extending” prophethood to their leaders.

### ***Dīn al-Fitrah: the Framework for Recognizing All Religions***

In terms of the actual content of the prophets’ revelations, these mainly consist of monotheistic doctrines.<sup>12</sup> The chief task of prophets is to remind man of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God; to rectify the ways of their people and guide them to the right path. This task, shared by all prophets, is closely rooted in the Islamic concept of *dīn al-ḥaqq*, the natural or original religion, thus providing a basis for Muslim recognition of non-Islamic traditions. “*Fitrah*,” as mentioned in the *Qur’ān* (30:30), is a natural inclination inherent in all individuals to embrace the *tawḥīd*.<sup>13</sup> While all humans are born with *ḥaqq*, and hence as Muslims, they can become alienated from it, taking up wrong beliefs and practices in the course of their lives. Therefore, *dīn al-ḥaqq*, the religion of *tawḥīd*, is also regarded as the source and basis of different religious traditions, exemplified in its most complete form in Islam. It precisely *is* Islam,<sup>14</sup> all other religions being mere offshoots which have retained only part of that essence (i.e., *tawḥīd*), or corrupted over the course of time.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the messages of different prophets became different religious traditions that have, in varying degrees, parts of the Truth. These prophets teach, or “allegorize,” the Truth in ways that are most suitable to their local cultures, so that some teachings are closer to the Truth than others.<sup>16</sup> This suggests that, while all prophets convey the message of *tawḥīd*, their teachings have different levels of validity dependent on how they interpreted them for their peoples. The fact that some prophetic messages have less “merit” than others may not be because the prophets in question were less capable, but because a full-fledged message of *tawḥīd* was less ideal for the peoples receiving that particular teaching.

The general implication that this doctrinal framework has for Islamic understanding of Buddhism, therefore, is twofold. Firstly, on an Islamic worldview, Buddhism, or the teaching of the Buddha, reflects some portion of the teaching of *tawḥīd* and it was Buddha’s mission to correct the religious inclinations of his time.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, the Buddhist tradition subsequently became altered or corrupted, with its followers alienating from their “*ḥaqq*,” which would anticipate the coming of Prophet Muḥammad.

### ***Applicability of the Framework: Non-Japanese Examples***

While views that the historical Buddha is mentioned in the *Qur’ān* have been put forward mainly by South Asian scholars, the doctrinal framework based on the concept of *dīn al-ḥaqq* is employed far more widely among Muslims of different theological convictions. Though their overall evaluations of Buddhism may be radically different, it is fairly clear that they follow the same line of thought concerning prophethood.

Speaking from a Sufi perspective, for example, Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927), an Indian Sufi teacher and founder of a Sufi order in the West, argues that all religions have the same essence, and that the purpose of Sufism is to “bring together” all religions,<sup>18</sup> rather than to bring all religions to Islam.<sup>19</sup> He further observes that their leaders have taught (different aspects of) the same message from God in different ways in different times to suit their audience “when the necessity arises.”<sup>20</sup> Regarding worship of the Buddha as a later development, inconsistent with what the Buddha taught, Khan observes that Buddhism teaches “that the innermost being of every soul is divine,” realization of which is the same as “the secret of Sufism.”<sup>21</sup>

Scholars of the Lahore Ahmadiyya movement<sup>22</sup> are keen to show that the Buddha actually taught *tauhīd*.<sup>23</sup> Mirza Tahir Ahmad (1928–2006), the fourth successor of the movement,<sup>24</sup> argues that a re-examination of early Buddhist sources shows that “Buddhism began like any other [d]ivinely revealed faith with its emphasis on the Unity of God.” According to him, “the Buddha was a believer in One Supreme Creator. What he rejected was polytheism.” Yet Buddhism, like Hinduism, has “moved away from their Divine origin over thousands years of decadence,” as is evidenced in their development of ascetic practices, which Mirza Tahir Ahmad denoted escapist in their reduction of an individual to absolute self-negation.

Despite probably being the most active critic of Buddhism in the contemporary Muslim world, Harun Yahya (1956–), a Turkish Muslim intellectual committed to refutation of Darwinism and materialism, appears to work within the same doctrinal framework as that of the first two Muslim figures. While harshly criticizing what he sees as an idolatrous tendency and an absence of God in Buddhism,<sup>25</sup> this Sunni writer speculates that the historical Buddha may have been a messenger sent to the Hindus, whose true religious teachings later become distorted.<sup>26</sup> As the only aspect of Buddhism of which he expresses direct appreciation is ethics,<sup>27</sup> it can be said that he recognizes the possibility of the Buddha being a messenger from God, even without finding indications that he taught monotheism.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Who Recognizes the Buddha as a Prophet and Why? Some Preliminary Remarks***

While they resort to the same doctrinal framework, the writers mentioned above provide different rationale for their recognition of the Buddha’s prophethood. This amply suggests that the doctrine of prophethood has a high level of applicability. However, their decision to discuss the prophethood of the Buddha cannot be attributed to the simple question of scriptural authority, as this does not explain why some Muslims elaborate on it while others do not. One possible factor in the willingness of some to consider the possibility is attributable to a sense of affinity with Buddhists and Buddhism. For some it could be a pragmatic measure towards harmonious coexistence, as has long been the case with South and Southeast Asian Muslims. There is also the theological relevance that can arise even for those who are not in regular contact with Buddhists. If a Muslim is impressed or even disturbed by Buddhist beliefs and practices,

they will be encouraged to contemplate how they can interpret and relate to the tradition. This may take the form of missionary activity, as exemplified by Harun Yahya, whose main aim is to show how “wrong” Buddhists beliefs and practices are from an Islamic perspective.

## **Discussing Prophethood in the Japanese Context**

While the doctrine of prophethood can provide a means for various types of Muslims to relate to the Buddhist tradition, employing it in the Japanese context entails a different set of issues. Before discussing how Muslims in Japan apply the doctrine of prophethood to Japanese religiosity, it is necessary to give a brief account of the situations surrounding Muslims in the country.

### ***Muslims in Japan***

While over seventy percent of the Japanese claim to be affiliated with Buddhism,<sup>29</sup> the current Muslim population in Japan is estimated to be around one hundred thousand; less than one percent of the entire population of the country.<sup>30</sup> The vast majority of these Muslims are non-Japanese who came to Japan to work or study and have settled, sometimes illegally as “overstayers.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the Japanese converts still number only something between seven to ten thousand.<sup>32</sup> While quite a few Japanese women converted upon marriage to non-Japanese Muslims working in Japan,<sup>33</sup> there also exist those who have embraced Islam out of their personal conviction.<sup>34</sup> It is the views of the latter type of converts that the present discussion is mainly concerned with.<sup>35</sup>

Non-Japanese Muslims in Japan<sup>36</sup> do not generally experience any more discrimination than non-Muslim foreigners, unless their religious observances (especially daily prayers) are perceived as hindering the general order of things in the society.<sup>37</sup> Employees of big companies seem to have little trouble carrying out their religious observances. However, performing daily prayers during work hours can be problematic in smaller workplaces, such as construction sites and factories, where many Muslims work.<sup>38</sup> Japanese within the wider society tend to be more suspicious of converts, regarding them as not conforming to the social norm.<sup>39</sup> However, situations vary depending on social circumstances and how practicing these Muslims are.

### ***Looking for a Japanese Prophet: Published Accounts of Japanese Muslims***

Japanese Muslim writings are generally more concerned with how Islam can be related to the Japanese culture than with how Buddhism can be interpreted according to Islam.<sup>40</sup> Those who do not mention the possibility of a Japanese prophet tend to be focused on discussing how different Islam is from the traditions already familiar to the Japanese. Criticising Buddhism for polytheism/idolatry and for lacking “practicality,” they are not usually interested in relating to it.<sup>41</sup>

Those who mention the possibility of a Japanese prophet, on the other hand, are more sympathetic to and accommodating about the religious beliefs and practices of Japan. For a Japanese prophet, however, they tend to look to the Shinto tradition, rather

than to Buddhism, although opinions differ on suitable candidates for the role.<sup>42</sup> For example, Kō Nakata (1960–), a scholar in Islamic studies,<sup>43</sup> is critical of the commonly-held view that Japanese Buddhism and Shinto are polytheistic, expressing particular sympathy towards the followers of Jōdo-Shin Buddhism and their reverence for Amida Buddha.<sup>44</sup> His willingness to accommodate Japanese traditions is also seen in his view, based on Ash'ari theology, that salvation is to be granted even to those who perform ancestor-worship.<sup>45</sup>

Among the Japanese Muslims who write about religions in Japan, virtually the only one who suggests that the message of *tawhīd* may have reached Japan through Buddhists is Haruo Abe (1920–1999). A member of the legal profession and translator of the *Qur'ān*, he argues for a “reform” of both Buddhism and Islam,<sup>46</sup> through which all religions would reach the “*daijō* (Mahāyāna) Islam,” the universal monotheism where Nyorai (Skt: *tathāgata*) is worshipped as the absolute being.<sup>47</sup> Though critical of the “deviation” into idolatry and pursuit of worldly interest found among some Japanese Buddhists,<sup>48</sup> Abe sees Japan as having a religious climate suitable for embracing and enhancing the way of universal monotheism.<sup>49</sup> For example, he recognises various historical figures who submitted themselves to Amida Buddha<sup>50</sup> as its pioneers.<sup>51</sup> While he refrains from calling them prophets of Islam, since “they had never heard a single passage of the *Qur'ān*,” this Japanese Muslim regards them as “saints who, by divine providence, paved the way for the coming of Islam to the East.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Why not a Buddhist Prophet in Japan?**

Following the Qur'ānic statement that every nation has a prophet, Japanese Muslims explore the possibility of a Japanese prophet, that is, a prophet sent to the Japanese. One of the possible reasons why they look to Shinto is that it is an indigenous tradition, whereas Buddhism was introduced as a foreign religion. The notion of Shinto as Japanese “*islām*” is also supported by the fact that Shinto contains the concepts of a highest deity (Amaterasu ōmikami, the great *kami* Amaterasu) and of a Creator deity (Ameno minakanushi).<sup>53</sup>

The question of where to look for the prophet sent to Japan may be further complicated by two possible interpretations of the above mentioned doctrinal framework. If every nation has a prophet, the historical Buddha has to be the prophet sent for India (or South Asia). Since a prophet cannot function for two nations (or perhaps cultural areas) simultaneously, the Buddha clearly cannot be the prophet for Japan as well as India. In addition, if every religion, as an offshoot of *dīn al-fiṭrah*, is started by a prophet, then there can be no more “Buddhist” prophets after Śākyamuni, entailing that Japan should expect a non-Buddhist prophet if it were to have one.

It is further possible that Japanese Muslims are discouraged from considering a Buddhist figure as a prophet for Japan because of the absence of unity in Japanese Buddhism and the relatively little emphasis it places on the historical Buddha. There are so many different schools, founded by different individuals, that it is virtually impossible to designate any one as predominant.<sup>54</sup> The strong focus often placed on their founders



also makes many of the schools in Japanese Buddhism somewhat detached from Śākyamuni Buddha. The above may form in part the rationale for Abe naming many Japanese Buddhists as potential Muslim saints without selecting one as proto-type (i.e. prophet).

## **Japanese Muslims on Buddhism: Converts' Dilemmas?**

Turning now to the context of Buddhist-Muslim relations, the present discussion of how Japanese Muslims approach the doctrine of prophethood focuses on their views of Śākyamuni Buddha, since there seems to be no consensus regarding a principal Japanese Buddhist figure. What follows is based on the results of a survey of Muslim views of Buddhism, which was conducted on both non-Japanese and Japanese Muslims based in Japan from November 2007 to October 2008.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Structure of the Survey***

The survey conducted was a highly qualitative one using interviewing and questionnaires, with most of the questions being open-ended. The respondents are representatives of Muslim organisations (including mosques) or those who regularly lead other Muslims in prayers and study groups, except for the one non-Japanese respondent in training at a Zen temple.<sup>56</sup> Since it targeted respondents knowledgeable about Islam, the survey does not purport to show trends in Muslim views in Japan as a whole. The lists of the respondents and of their views are found below.<sup>57</sup>

Among the variety of questions established for the questionnaire<sup>58</sup> the present discussion focuses on the one concerning the historical Buddha, although comments for other sections are taken into consideration where necessary. In order to find out how aware respondents were of the above mentioned implications of the doctrine of prophethood, and how interested they were in potentially applying it to the historical Buddha, the question does not directly ask about the possibility. It runs: "Which of the following do you consider as the closest to Śākyamuni Buddha in terms of status and nature? Please tick the appropriate item and explain why." There are seven alternatives given: "Allah, Prophet Muḥammad, 'Ali (the 4th caliph), a prophet, a saint, other (please specify)," and "I don't know." The respondent is expected to choose one (or more) from the given alternatives and explain the choice. While some of the concrete alternatives have been suggested by contemporary writers, this formula mainly intends to clarify what the question is asking and to provide some "ice-breakers" for the respondent.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Responses Overview***

There are four views from each group to be considered. The non-Japanese respondents originated from Turkey, India, Malaysia and Azerbaijan. Apart from the Azerbaijani respondent, they did not possess much knowledge about Buddhism. They tended to talk about early or Theravāda Buddhism, usually displaying very little knowledge about Mahāyāna Buddhism.<sup>60</sup> The Japanese respondents include one from a

Pure Land Buddhist family, two who identified themselves as converted from Buddhism and one as converted from Christianity. One of the converts from Buddhism used to be a keen practitioner and the convert from Christianity had received Buddhist academic training.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the non-Japanese respondents, the Japanese respondents were clearer about the distinctions between the Buddhism practiced in Japan and that found elsewhere. Idolatry, divinisation of the Buddha (or his statue) and the concept of reincarnation, were found to be problematic by non-Japanese and Japanese Muslims alike, while the status of Buddhist monks in Japan was only noted by Japanese respondents. Śākyamuni Buddha was regarded as a prophet or a prophet-like figure by all non-Japanese respondents, while only two Japanese Muslims mentioned that alternative as a possibility without fully endorsing it.

### ***Non-Japanese Responses***

Though highly suspicious about certain Buddhist beliefs and practices, Respondent no.1 (1966–), director of a Muslim organization, is confident that basic values are common to peoples of all religious convictions. Although he strongly criticised the Buddhist notion of reincarnation and what he perceives as idolatry in Buddhist practice, this Turkish scholar maintained that Buddhist teachings are similar to those found in Islam. He argued that “90% of the value system and social etiquette of the Japanese is shared with Islam,” although he was unsure “to what extent that [comes from] a Buddhist influence.”

With a perspective very similar to that of *dīn al-ḥaqq*, he suggested that the original message of Buddhism had been distorted somewhere along the way: “Though the Śākyamuni Buddha did not claim that he was a god, he has been idolised, and his disciples have also been deified.” This may suggest that the projected original message of the Buddha itself may have been acceptable from his Muslim point of view. However, he was reluctant to recognize the historical Buddha as a prophet, since he “did not have a revelation,” but was willing to view him as “prophetic in terms of his position.” This implies two things: firstly that he does not regard the Buddha as teaching *ṭawḥīd*, which presumably forms the core of the prophetic message; and secondly, that the one essence shared by all religions in his theory is not monotheism, but moral and ethical teachings. In this regard it is notable that he stated in a dialogue with a Buddhist that he regarded Śākyamuni Buddha, as well as all other Buddhas, as prophets sent by the Only Creator God to propagate the Truth. He viewed Buddhism as idolatrous, yet originally idol-free. His argument that all religions share common origins was based, as in the present analysis, on the idea of common ethical values.<sup>62</sup> While he may have made the comments regarding prophethood as a friendly gesture towards the Buddhist with whom he was in dialogue, they do amply suggest that he is not at all averse to recognising the Buddha as a prophet.

Respondent no.2 (1956–), the Da’wah director of another Muslim organization with an Indian background, seemed to regard theories that the Buddha is a prophet favorably, mentioning that the Buddha features in the *Qur’ān* as Dhu-l Kifl. Although he appeared



to suspect that Buddhist teaching lacks the concept of *tawḥīd*, he did suggest that the Buddha was one of the 124,000 unnamed prophets found in the *ḥadīth*. Possible reasons for his willingness to support theories about the Buddha's prophethood are that they, as seen above, have been advocated by Indian scholars. He may also be sympathetic towards the Buddha as a fellow Indian. It is however highly intriguing that he regards the Buddha as a prophet while viewing Buddhism as lacking *tawḥīd*. Given that he maintains the Buddha taught people only "good things," it seems that this awareness of the moral and ethical teachings common to both traditions forms the basis for accepting Buddhism as related to Islam via prophethood.

Respondent no.3 (1973–) serves as an imam at a major mosque. His wife (1975–, referred as Respondent no.3f) is a government officer. They also emphasized the common ethical principle between Islam and Buddhism: Although "Muslims don't believe in reincarnation," Islam and Buddhism share "basic [moral and ethical] principles or good deeds being rewarded and bad deeds being punished in the hereafter." They recognised the historical Buddha as a prophet, mentioning the possibility of him being one of the 124,000 prophets. They even suggested that Śākyamuni had revelation; a sign of a genuine prophethood. They said he "was shown the light of truth from a divine source, and from there after (sic.) he spread the words of wisdom to others, which is not very different from the functions of a prophet in Islam." Though they do not specify what kind of "wisdom" he taught, Respondent no.3's remark that "[b]efore, [Buddhism] was a true religion," could suggest that Buddhism has "digressed" from true monotheism and that the Buddha might have taught *tawḥīd*, the true message of *Islam*. Respondent no.3f, on the other hand, observed that "Buddhism is not [a] religion" but "[a] philosophy, or good manners." This implies that what has given her and her husband the impression that Islam and Buddhism share the same origin is their awareness that both traditions have similar moral and ethical teachings, rather than that the Buddha (may have) taught *tawḥīd*. In other words, it is the general appreciation of Buddhism as maintaining ethics which led these respondents to recognise the Buddha as a Muslim prophet and to therefore suspect that he may have originally taught monotheism.

Respondent no.4 (1984–), an Azerbaijani Muslim in training at a Sōtō Zen temple, also expressed certainty that Śākyamuni Buddha was a prophet. She found no conflict in practicing both Islam and Buddhism, even suggesting that Buddhism and Islam work with the same sense of the Ultimate Reality. She was born to a mixed background of Sunni and Shi'i parents and later developed a Sufi inclination as she explored her religious identity.<sup>63</sup> Viewing being one with the universe (Jap: *uchū*) in Zen as sharing the same spirit as the Sufi identification with God, she observed that "they use different expressions, but what they feel is the same." This young Muslim lady also claimed that Muḥammad was in the Sufi state, or the state of *satori*, when he received the revelation, just as Śākyamuni Buddha achieved enlightenment in the state of Zen (i.e. meditation). Thus connecting the two traditions on an experiential level, she argued that the historical Buddha was one of the prophets sent by God, who were "all human beings" and "propagated right teachings to [their fellow] human beings."<sup>64</sup> Though she

did not mention revelation or *tawḥīd*, it is clear that she regards the ultimate message of Buddhism and Islam as identical, and attained through meditation by Śākyamuni and Muḥammad, respectively.

### ***Prophethood without the Message of Tawḥīd?***

As seen in the previous section, non-Japanese responses show that the doctrine of prophethood is employed by Muslims from a variety of backgrounds. The willingness of the South and Southeast Asian respondents to accept the prophethood of the Buddha could be understood as in part a tendency nurtured through long history of encounter with Buddhism. Respondent no.4's recognition of the historical Buddha as a prophet, on the other hand, seems to stem from her own spiritual experience (based on her Sufi inclination), rather than her Azerbaijani background.

What is more, the rationale they give for their views seem to suggest, as in the case with Harun Yahya, that teaching monotheism is not an absolutely necessary condition for the historical Buddha to qualify as a prophet. Those who hold that the Buddha is a prophet do not overtly argue that he taught *tawḥīd*. They either imply it or completely ignore the matter, thereby naming the Buddha as a prophet without expressly finding *tawḥīd* in his teachings.<sup>65</sup> They are more focused on common ethical values (or, in the case of Respondent no.4, a shared sense of the Ultimate Truth) in arguing that Buddhism is related to Islam via the prophethood of the Buddha.

### ***Japanese Responses***

Respondent no.5 (1951–), who regularly leads study sessions on Islam, was raised in a family of Jōdo-Shin practitioners. He paid critical attention to the position of Buddhist monks in Japan, commenting that “Buddhism [in Japan] exists as an occupation to support monks’ lives.”<sup>66</sup> He argued that “[i]n Buddhism, it is up to monks as part of their occupation [to follow religious precepts],” whereas Muslims “deal with them on the basis of individual responsibility.” While he acknowledges that Allah and Amida Buddha “might be the closest considering that they [both] are the object [for their followers] to completely submit to,” he regards Śākyamuni Buddha, as an “ordinary human being (Jap: *tadano ningen*),” or a “philosopher,” because “he was not chosen by God via revelation.” As in the view of Respondent no.2, the supposed absence of revelation here implies that the respondent does not regard the Buddha’s teaching as containing *tawḥīd*.

Respondent no.6 (1960–) is a convert from Christianity with academic training in and personal involvement with both Christianity and Buddhism.<sup>67</sup> She was also reluctant to compare Śākyamuni with an Islamic figure. She expressed more appreciation for early and Theravāda Buddhism<sup>68</sup> than for Mahāyāna Buddhism, which she views as digressing “significantly from its starting point” since it “fabricates many Buddhas and worships bodhisattvas other than the [historical] Buddha.” Regarding Theravāda Buddhism, she notes that it “does not believe in an absolute existence called God but that [its practitioners] rely on themselves in endeavoring to pursue the [ultimate] truth,” finding

it “unusual among religions.” Yet, she calls this attitude of striving on a spiritual path “wonderful,” noting that “self-discipline” is valued in both Islam and Buddhism.<sup>69</sup>

However, her appreciation of the teachings of the historical Buddha as expressed in early Buddhism does not lead her to consider positively the possibility that Buddhism may have the same origin as Islam nor that the Buddha may be a Muslim prophet. According to her, Śākyamuni cannot be compared to any Muslim figure because Muḥammad and other Muslim leaders “were faithful to God’s teachings . . . a completely different reason from why Gautama Siddhārtha was respected.” While her concern for doctrinal precision may stem from her academic background, or from the strong sense of commitment to Islam she has as a convert,<sup>70</sup> this Japanese woman expressed regret about the impossibility of establishing doctrinal connections between the two traditions. This, coupled with her appreciation for basic Buddhist principles, renders an unspoken sense of attachment to the tradition she still holds in high regard.

Turning now to the “converts” from Buddhism, they express clear awareness of the historical Buddha’s potential prophethood, though they do not fully support it due to lack of clear evidence. While he claims to have converted from Buddhism, Respondent no.7 (1966–), one of the very few Japanese imams in Japan and an IT engineer by profession, does not seem to possess much knowledge about the tradition. This suggests that although he was from a Buddhist family, he was not a seriously practicing Buddhist.<sup>71</sup> His main concern about Buddhism was the way it left the question of God unexplained. He finds “the concept of a Creator and the question of who determines the fate in the afterlife (Jap: *raise*, also meaning next life)” in Buddhism to be “very lofty, or ambiguous.” However, it is notable that, as Respondents no.3 and 3f, he commented that he viewed both traditions as expressing the doctrine that what one does in this world is the deciding factors in one’s fate in the next life (or afterlife).

Regarding the position of the historical Buddha, he chooses the alternative “a prophet,” mentioning elements that can support the possibility of the Buddha’s prophethood. Yet, he eventually calls it “impossible to tell [if he is a prophet] as there is no clear concept of Creator in Buddhism.” However, he does note that some Muslims insist that the Buddha is one of the prophets, further observing that the Buddha’s teachings and the *Ḥadīth* display similarity in terms of content and narrative style.<sup>72</sup> His openness to the possibility of the Buddha’s prophethood could also be seen in his remark that “only Allah knows the truth of the matter.”

Respondent no.8 (1975–), an employee at a Japanese company who often leads study groups for Muslims,<sup>73</sup> also takes a positive position regarding the possibility that Śākyamuni Buddha was a prophet. However, the lack of *tauhīd* he finds in the Buddha’s teachings stops him from endorsing the notion of the Buddha as a prophet. Calling himself an “ex-Buddhist,” he says that he used to be particularly attracted to Tantric Buddhism and that, when he was fourteen, he was “determined” to become a Buddhist monk and to attain Enlightenment. At that time, he “thought that [he had] found the Truth in Buddhism since it was the closest religion” to him. Despite the profound

interest he previously had in Buddhism, and a number of similarities he finds between the two religions,<sup>74</sup> he joined other Japanese respondents in criticising the position of Buddhist monks in Japan. However, he expressed a similar understanding of the Buddhist worldview to that of the non-Japanese Muslims: Buddhism “view[s] the life as a source of all the sufferings.”<sup>75</sup>

When it comes to questions about doctrinal compatibility, however, one can see this keen respondent desiring more substantial bridges than could be found.<sup>76</sup> He compares the historical Buddha to both prophet and saint, yet is not entirely sure if the choice of the former can be supported in terms of Islamic teachings. He explained his views thus: “It makes me a little sad not to be able to say, “Yes, I believe that he was one of the chosen prophets,” but I cannot say this because I couldn’t find even a trace of the teaching of “Tawheed (sic.)” in the traces of old Buddhism . . . I hope that he was one of the prophets but there is no evidence, thus, he was one of the righteous saints.” For this Japanese convert, granting the title of prophet to Śākyamuni, who did not teach *tawhīd*, would simply be “compromising (sic.) Truth . . . because the Truth is one and clear.”

### ***Attachment to Buddhism v. Commitment to Islam***

The last respondent’s comments provide strong indication that previous personal involvement with Buddhism may lead to some sense of attachment to it, giving rise to the desire to see more doctrinal relevance established between the two traditions. The acknowledgement that Respondents no.7 and 8 make about once being Buddhists also does not seem to be unrelated to the serious thought they have given to the possibility of the Buddha’s prophethood. It is further possible that Japanese Muslims generally have some attachment to their cultural background, a significant part of which may be represented by Buddhism, even if they were never particularly committed to it. Respondent’s no.5’s willingness to recognize similarities between Islam and Buddhism, even though he was rather uninterested in exploring the possibility of Śākyamuni’s prophethood, suggests that he has retained sympathy towards his family’s religion.

While these Japanese Muslims may have a certain degree of sympathy for and attachment to Buddhism, they appear to be highly committed believers and attempt to be as doctrinally “upright” as possible. Though the contexts of their conversion may differ, leading to different types of piety and practical commitment to Islam, it is probable that they belong to a group of converts devoted to adherence to Islamic beliefs.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the non-Japanese respondents, these Japanese Muslims do not recognize the prophethood of the Buddha, even if they do express appreciation of the Buddha’s moral and ethical teachings. For them, the absence of the concept of the only Creator God (or *tawhīd*) in the Buddha’s teaching is the main obstacle to his qualifying as a prophet. As much as they might like to find “proof” of the Buddha’s prophethood, they do not feel that there is strong enough evidence in either Buddhist or Islamic teachings to support the notion.

## Conclusion

Unlike the non-Japanese respondents, who based the idea that Buddhism shares the same origins as Islam and that the Buddha may have been a prophet on a sense of shared ethical values, the Japanese Muslim respondents do not accept the Buddha as a prophet since he did not teach monotheism. In exploring the implications that this has for future developments in Japanese Muslim views of Buddhism, three possible reasons for these results can be highlighted.

The first is the relatively lesser importance attached to Śākyamuni Buddha in Japanese Buddhism, compared to the unique status he has elsewhere in Asia, especially in Theravāda countries.

The second is the absence of much involvement (compared with that found in South and Southeast Asia) that Muslims have with Buddhists in Japan. The Japanese Muslim views of the Buddha and Buddhism in general also seem to be influenced by the generally negative perception they have of the Buddhism practiced in Japan. However, the appreciation that some express for basic Buddhist principles suggests that more positive experience with Buddhists in Japan might result in an increased willingness to recognise the Buddha as a prophet.

The third and last factor is that, as converts seriously committed to their chosen faith, they are more cautious about being “creative” with Islamic doctrines than those born into Muslim families. However, as they do appear to wish to make more doctrinal links between the tradition they have converted to and that of their forefathers, to which they may be attached, it is possible that they will one day recognise the Buddha as a prophet. This process may be enhanced by more interfaith dialogue as well as more grassroots involvement, generating greater understanding of Buddhists and appreciation of Buddhism.<sup>78</sup>

### List of respondents and views (f means female respondent)

#### Non-Japanese respondents

	born	nationality and sect/school	occupation and position	view of Śākyamuni Buddha
1	1966	Turkish, Sunni	director of Muslim organisation	prophetic but not a prophet (yet contradicts this in dialogue)
2	1956	Indian, Sunni	Da'wah director of Muslim organisation, university lecturer	a prophet, Dhu-l Kifl
3	1973 / 1975 (f)	Malaysian, Sunni	imam / government officer	a prophet
4	1984	Azerbaijani, mixed, Sufi	medical student, practices Zen	a prophet

### Japanese respondents

	born	converted from	occupation and position	view of Śākyamuni Buddha
5	1951	not specified	university lecturer, leads study groups	a philosopher
6	1960 (f)	Christianity	self-employed, based at major mosque	not comparable to a Muslim figure
7	1966	Buddhism	IT engineer, imam	possibly a prophet but impossible to tell
8	1975	Buddhism	company employee, leads study groups	possibly a prophet but more like a saint

All Japanese respondents are Sunni Muslims from generally Buddhist families.

### Endnotes

1. The author wishes to thank Prof. Yahya Michot for the opportunity to publish her research and Dr. Afifi al-Akiti for his suggestions on an earlier draft.

2. Ibn al-Nadīm, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 824, 831–2.

3. Bruce, B., Lawrence, *Shabrastānī on the Indian Religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 113–4. The identity of this figure is still debated.

4. Although it is sometimes suggested that Buddhism is not properly practiced in Japan, the present paper regards the country as generally Buddhist on the grounds that it has many Buddhist monks and temples, and that the majority of its population claim to be Buddhist and perform Buddhist rituals.

5. From the end of the nineteenth through to the early twentieth century, the Japanese military authority had much involvement with Muslims, especially those with Pan-Islamist ambitions, which were abandoned at the end of WWII.

6. Some prophets (Ar: *nabī*) are also messengers (Ar: *rasūl*), messengers being of more elevated statutes than prophets. *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. “Prophets and Prophethood.”

7. Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 40.

8. *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. “Prophets and Prophethood.”

9. 124,000 is given in the *Musnad* by Ahmad ibn Hanbal. See, for example, Islam Online, “List of the Prophets’ Names,” Fatwa Bank <[http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask\\_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503543348](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503543348)> [accessed on 23/08/2009].

10. While there is no established view of his identity, some hold that he is Prophet Ezekiel. Also see note 23 below.

11. The former theory is considered to have been first propounded by Abu’l Kalam Azad (1888–1958), an Urdu scholar and political figure who fought for India’s independence. The latter theory was proposed by the renowned Indian scholar of Islam, Muhammad Hamidullah (1909–2002). See Zayaul Haque, “A Hindu view of Islam,” *The Milli Gazette* (15 May 2001) <<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15052001/sign.htm>> [accessed on 23/08/2009]; Muhammad Hamidullah, *Mubammad Rasuluhullah: A Concise Survey of the Life and Work of the Founder of Islam* (Hyderabad: Habib & Co., 1974), 27; Imtiyaz Yusuf, “Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand,” *East-West Center Washington Working Papers* 7 (March 2007): 1–25, see 7.



12. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "Prophets and Prophethood."
13. Yasien Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 16–17, 85; Isma'il al-Faruqi, "On the Nature of Islamic Da'wah," *International Review of Mission* 65/260 (October 1976): 391–409, see 395.
14. Given the central position the Islamic tradition has among religions, it may be useful to call this concept "*islām*."
15. Mohamed, *Fitra*, 14, 22f. For an elaboration on this concept in the context of Muslim views of other religions, see, Isma'il al-Faruqi, "Islam and Other Faiths" in *The Challenge of Islam*, ed. Altaf Gauhar (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), 82–111, see. 94–5; Fadhullah Wilmot, "How Does Islam Regard Other Religions?" <<http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=3282>> [accessed on 01/08/2009].
16. Rahman, *Prophecy*, 41–2.
17. It has been suggested by a Muslim scholar that the Buddha was to tackle the polytheistic tendency of Hindus, though he does not regard him as a prophet. Imran Nazar Hosein, *Islam and Buddhism in the Modern World* (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1972), 9.
18. Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*, 14 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 10: 257.
19. While such a notion of universal spirituality may not be accepted by all Muslims, the point here is that the doctrine of prophethood is employed in support of it.
20. Khan, *The Sufi Message*, 9: 150, 164, 233; 10: 253.
21. *Ibid.*, 9: 167.
22. Although their movement is often regarded as heretical, their work is included here because of the importance they attach to the Islamic Scriptures.
23. Abdul Haq Vidyarthi (1888–1977), another Ahmadiyya scholar, argues not only that the Dhu-l Kifl is the Buddha, but also that Prophet Muhammad is Maitreya Buddha, whose coming was prophesied by the historical Buddha. A. H. Vidyarthi, *Mohammad in World Scriptures, vol. 3: A Comparative Study of the Teachings and Prophecies Foretelling the Advent of the Holy Prophet Mohammed found Extant in Zoroastrian, Hindu, and Buddhist Scriptures* (Lahore, Din Muhammadi Press, 1975), 1005–6, 1049.
24. Mirza Tahir Ahmad, "Buddhism," in *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth* (1998), Part II <[http://www.alislam.org/library/books/revelation/part\\_2\\_section\\_2.html](http://www.alislam.org/library/books/revelation/part_2_section_2.html)> [accessed 14/07/2009].
25. See Harun Yahya, *Islam and Buddhism* (2003) and *Islam and Karma* (2002) <[http://www.harunyahya.com/en.m\\_book\\_index.php](http://www.harunyahya.com/en.m_book_index.php)> [accessed 01/08/2009].
26. Yahya, *Islam and Karma*, 10, 160. He also speculates that since Śākyamuni Buddha heralded the coming of a "saviour-messiah," the Buddha Maitreya, this could be Prophet Muhammad. Yahya, *Islam and Buddhism*, 170.
27. Yahya, *Islam and Buddhism*, 110, 159.
28. While he uses the word "messenger," it probably means the same thing as "prophet," for his main intention is to suggest the potential validity of the Buddha's teachings, rather than to detail their content.
29. Many of them are also affiliated with Shinto, making double religious affiliation a norm. For recent statistics, see Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology, "Shūkyō tōkei chōsa," <[http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/toukei/001/index39.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/001/index39.htm)> [accessed on 30/07/2009].
30. Emile A. Nakhleh, introduction to "Islam in Japan: A Cause for Concern?" *Asia Policy* 5 (2008): 63. Also see Taka-aki Matsumoto, "Nihon no Kōkōsei ga Idaku Isurāmuzō to Sonozesei ni Muketa Torikumi," Special Issue II: Perception of Islam in Japanese Schools, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21/2 (2006): 193–214, see 195; Mimasaka Higuchi, *Nihonjin Musurimu toshite Ikiru* (Tokyo: Kōsei shuppansha, 2007), 195.
31. While many came from Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 80s, the most common origins of recent non-Japanese Muslim residents are Indonesia and Pakistan. Hiroshi Kojima, "Demographic Analysis of Muslims in Japan," *The 13th KAMES and 5th AFMA International Symposium*, Pusan (2004),

184–9; Keiko Sakurai, *Nihon no Murusimu Shakai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2003), ch.3; Naoto Higuchi, “Tainichi Musurimu Imin no Kiseki o Meguru Toi” in *Kokkyō o Koeru: Tainichi Musurimu no Shakaigaku* by Naoto Higuchi et al. (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2007), 13f.

32. Ei-in Yasuda, et al., *Eichi: Tero o Koeru Shūkyō no Chikara* (Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha, 2005), 60.

33. The number of such women is estimated to be around two thousand. Kyōdō Tsūshinsha Henshū I-inshitsu, “Heiwa no Shūkyō Nanoni: Seiten Kōran no Hitobito,” in *Takokuseki Jipangu no Shuyakutachi: Shin Kaikokukō*, ed. Kyōdō Tsūshinsha (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2003), 156.

34. For a list of major Japanese converts to Islam, see for example Hiroshi Suzuki, *Isurāmukyōto no Iibun* (Tokyo: Mekon, 2002), 239f.

35. While space does not allow a discussion of different types of converts, it can be assumed from their roles in the Muslim community and willingness to share their views for academic purposes, that the Japanese Muslims discussed in the present paper all actively embrace Islamic teachings, and consciously represent the tradition in the country. As adequate research has not yet been conducted regarding Japanese (Buddhist) converts to Islam, reference will be made to literature on conversion of North American and Europeans in general, and to Islam, in analyzing the data.

36. Many of the mosques in Japan have a mixed congregation, but they also function as meeting points for non-Japanese Muslims of the same cultural and linguistic background. For a list of Muslim organizations and mosques in Japan, see “Isrāmu no Hōmu Pēji,” <<http://www2.dokidoki.ne.jp/islam/benri/benriindex.htm>> [accessed on 10/11/2007].

37. The general level of knowledge of Islamic teachings among the Japanese is quite low. While many are aware of basic Muslim practices, they do not appreciate how important religious rules are in Islam, often considering it too strict and legalistic. For Japanese views of Islam, see for example Toru Miura, “Preface” and “Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools: Questionnaire Survey and Textbooks,” Special Issue II: Perception of Islam in Japanese Schools, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21/2 (2006): 169–91; Matsumoto, “Nihon no Kōkōsei ga Idaku Isurāmuzō.”

38. Sakurai, *Murusimu Shakai*, 197, 220–1; Takuya Tazawa, *Musurimu Nippon* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 212–3; Michael Penn, “Islam in Japan,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10/1 (2006) <<http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/168/1/>> [accessed on 06/04/2009]; Michael Penn, “Public Faces and Private Spaces: Islam in the Japanese Context,” *Asia Policy* 5 (2008): 95f.

39. See previous note; Naoko Kawada, *Nihonjin Joseishinto ga Kataru Isurāmu An-nai* (Tokyo: Tsukubanesha, 2004), 179.

40. Though Buddhist-Muslim dialogues in Japan have been gradually increasing after the 9/11 incident, they tend to focus on practices and ethics and rarely address doctrinal issues such as the possibility of the Buddha’s prophethood or of a Japanese prophet.

41. See, e.g. Suzuki, *Iibun*, 78, 226.

42. For a representative example, see Japan Muslim Association, “Isurāmu Q&A” <<http://muslimkyoukai.jp/qanda.htm#3>> [accessed on 11/11/2007].

43. Kō Nakata, *Isurāmu no Rojikkū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 74.

44. Nakata, *Rojikkū*, 72f. For another Muslim criticism of the monotheism-polytheism contrast, see Kawada, *Isurāmu An-nai*, 29.

45. Kō Nakata, “Kyūsai no Kyōkai: Isurāmu ni Okeru Ikyōto no Kyūsai” <<http://www1.doshisha.ac.jp/~knakata/newpage39.html>> [accessed on 11/11/2007].

46. Haruo Abe, *Isurāmukyō* (Tokyo: Gendai shokan, 1986), 6, 153.

47. Ibid. Nyorai here seems to refer to Amida Nyorai (Buddha). See note 50 below. Although the Ultimate Divinity is called in such a Buddhist name, Abe ultimately disregards the particularities of various Buddhist traditions, urging them to converge with Islam. The similarities he notes between Buddhism and Islam are just stepping stones to lead Buddhists to Islam. Ryūshin Azuma (1936–), a Sōtō Zen scholar, calls Abe’s agenda “Islamic absolutism.” Ryūshin Azuma, *Nihon-no Bukkyō to Isurāmu* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2002), 203–5, 209.

48. Abe, *Isuramukyō*, 61.

49. *Ibid.*, 152.

50. Amida Buddha, the foremost object of worship in Pure Land Buddhism, has been compared to Allah by Japanese Buddhists, as a saviour and a manifestation of emptiness, the ultimate truth in (Mahāyāna) Buddhism. See for example Rikyū Kono, "Kōran ni Mirareru Arrā to Shinran no Amidabutsu" *Indotetsugaku Bukkyōgaku* 4 (1989): 325–33.

51. Abe, *Isuramukyō*, 152–5.

52. *Ibid.*, 154.

53. *Ame-no-minaka-nusbi-no-kami* is one of the three heavenly *musubi* deities mentioned in the *Kojiki*. *Musubi* is the spirit of birth, becoming, accomplishment, combination, harmonisation and growth. A *Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, ed. Brian Bocking (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), s.v. "*ame-no-minaka-nusbi-no-kami*" and "*musubi-no-kami*."

54. For the rare view of Prince Shōtoku (574–622), who is sometimes called the founder of Japanese Buddhism, as a prophet for Japan, see Safa Sawada, *Nihon-batsu: Isurāmu ga Sekai o Sukū* (Tokyo: CHC, 2004), 92f.

55. It was conducted as part of the author's D.Phil project at the University of Oxford.

56. Although she does not play a leading role among Muslims in Japan, and has closer affiliation with Buddhism, it is expected that, given her direct involvement with Buddhism, her view is extremely valuable in exploring how Muslims can relate to it.

57. The survey was conducted in English and Japanese. Responses in Japanese have been translated into English by the author. While only a few of the respondents wished to remain anonymous, they are unnamed for the purpose of simplicity here.

58. The questions ask for the respondent's personal data, and about their knowledge of Buddhism, contact with Buddhists, general perceptions of Buddhism, reactions to major criticisms posed by some Buddhists, and their views on the doctrinal compatibility between Islam and Buddhism, opinions regarding future Buddhist-Muslim relations and further comments.

59. Although it is prohibited in Islam to associate Allah with anything, the term is included among the alternatives as similarities have been pointed out between Him and the ultimate truth in Buddhism. See note 50 above.

60. They are also ignorant of Buddhas other than Śākyamuni.

61. All Japanese respondents are from a family affiliated with Buddhism, though not all their family members are practicing Buddhists.

62. Selim Jucel Gulec and Toshihide Adachi, "Isrāmu tonō Taiwa," 2, *Chion* (November 2006): 6–17, see 10–14, 17.

63. Now a medical student, her academic interest is how mental/psychological problems can be treated with medicine based on Zen or Sufi practice.

64. She says that Muslims generally do not accept such views, Indians being one exception.

65. It is sometimes not clear whether the respondent is discussing what the Buddha taught or what they view Buddhists currently holding and practicing. Given that the respondents in this category seem to be largely concerned with early and Theravāda Buddhism, the present analysis treats what they regard to be Buddhist teaching as the same as what they think the Buddha taught.

66. For example, he mentions monks charging lay followers for a posthumous Buddhist name (Jap: *kaimyō*).

67. Apart from early Buddhism, which she studied at university, she is familiar with Shingon Buddhism, which her mother practices, and Zen.

68. The original term is Hīnayāna (Jap: *shōjō*).

69. She is highly appreciative of major Buddhist ideas such as "the Three Marks of Existence, the Four Noble Truth and the Noble Eightfold Path."

70. It is clear from her claim that it does not make sense for a monotheistic religion to tolerate others, since this would lead to "inconsistency in its doctrine," that she regards it as of foremost importance to be faithful to Islamic teachings.

71. Perhaps he did not have much exposure to Buddhist practices, since he spent much of his childhood in Europe. See Tazawa, *Musurimu Nippon*, 207f; Kyōdō Tsūshinsha, “Heiwa no Shūkyō Nanoni,” 152–6.

72. He mentions a *ḥadīth* about brushing teeth with a toothbrush made out of a twig.

73. Respondent no.8 was suggested by Respondent no.3 (snowball method).

74. The list includes the mercy of the Buddha and Allah and their role in salvation.

75. He is also suspicious of the concept of reincarnation. Though he does not specify why he did not remain Buddhist, these elements may have led to his rejection of Buddhism.

76. While observing that Amida Buddha is unlike Allah in that he is not known to be the perfect being or the Creator of the Universe, like Respondent 5 he recognises that Amida Buddha is similar to Allah in that his followers face “him alone and no one other.”

77. See Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 132; Rebecca Sachs Norris, “Converting to What?: Embodied Culture and the Adoption of New Beliefs,” in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 174. Although research has yet to be done on how committed such active converts are to Islam compared to born Muslims, the author’s impression is concurrent with Köse’s view that the former tend to take its teachings more seriously than the latter. That some European converts perceive born Muslims as not practicing Islam properly is noted in Anne Sofie Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context: the Experience of Scandinavian Converts* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 263–72.

78. If their current observation of how Buddhism is practiced generally in Japan were to stand, then this possibility would require placing attention on those whom they feel are practicing the tradition seriously.